

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

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George Dunlap

Chairman, Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners

Final

Good morning! Welcome to Mecklenburg County's State of the County address.

As chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, I consider it an honor and privilege to continue in this longstanding tradition.

This time last year, I presented the State of the County Address before an audience at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center – just as I have in years past.

Unbeknown to anyone, life in Mecklenburg County was about to change.

Three weeks after my speech, Mecklenburg County confirmed its first positive case of COVID-19 – joining the long list of cities, towns and counties in the United States and abroad, to be impacted by the deadly virus.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Now one year later – more than 96,313 people have tested positive for COVID-19 and more than 869 have lost their lives due to the virus.

The lives of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, neighbors and friends. Gone from us forever – but never forgotten. May the light of their love ***never*** go dim.

Let us pause for a moment of silence in honor of those we have lost.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Thank you.

COVID-19 has presented many challenges within our community - from changing the way we conduct our daily lives, to how we interact with one another.

The past year has been a test of our will and has challenged our ***resiliency***.

I personally want to thank County Manager Dena Diorio and her staff for their commitment to the community throughout the course of the pandemic.

Our Public Health Director, Gibbie Harris and her staff have worked hand in hand with our County Manager – to provide guidance and direction for our residents – while partnering with municipalities locally and statewide to combat a common foe.

Your efforts have not gone unnoticed. Thank you for bringing us to a place that many have longed to see – and that is distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

VACCINE UPDATE

Mecklenburg County received its first shipment of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine on December 22 and administered the first dose on the next day to Public Health Immunization Program Manager, Jeanne Williams.

Twenty additional people received their first dose of the vaccine on that same day.

And in the days and weeks that followed, our Public Health staff have worked countless hours to administer the vaccine to eligible groups as determined by State health officials.

Beginning with healthcare workers and staff and residents at our long-term care facilities – to our most ***vulnerable*** residents, the elderly, and our teachers, childcare workers and school staff.

As of February 28, more than 102,637 people have received the first dose of the vaccine!

This number does not include doses provided in long term care facilities or through the Federal Pharmacy Program.

Our Public Health department is working expeditiously to assure that the vaccine is available across **all** communities in Mecklenburg County, by joining with local partners to spread the word about the vaccine's safety, effectiveness and availability – especially in communities – where hesitancy or obstacles may exist.

But we **cannot** claim victory yet.

Health officials estimate that 65 to 85 percent of the community must be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity. So, while we are making progress – there is still a long way to go.

Meanwhile, Mecklenburg County will remain committed to making every resource available in order to win the fight against COVID-19.

Despite the many challenges COVID-19 has presented over the last year – the State of Mecklenburg County **remains** strong!

ECONOMIC UPDATE

Mecklenburg County's unemployment rate is slowly trending lower.

At the height of the pandemic, jobless claims rose around the globe as the crippling effects of COVID-19 rippled throughout communities both large and small.

Mecklenburg County was no different. By May of 2020, the County's unemployment rate increased to 13.6 percent with 82,053 people unemployed, but today I am happy to announce that the trend is slowly changing as more residents gain employment opportunities.

In December, the County's unemployment rate was 6.1 percent!

And **new** opportunities are ahead as Mecklenburg County continues to attract new businesses.

In 2020, Mecklenburg County had five major announcements from businesses committed to bringing new jobs to the area.

Arrival, Centene Corporation, Chime Solutions, Gladfelter Company and Tranzact Insurance Solutions LLC all announced plans to create new opportunities in Mecklenburg County, by creating more than 3900 (3957) jobs combined!

And Mecklenburg County continues to be the home of 14 Fortune 1000 companies with 7 of them being Fortune 500.

POPULATION UPDATE

Where opportunity exists – people tend to follow.

Mecklenburg County is the 40th largest County in the nation and home to more than 1.1 million residents!

The County's population is projected to grow faster than the national average over the next 30 years with a projected 600,000 new residents expected to make Mecklenburg County their home!

BOARD PRIORITIES UPDATE

For the last two years – my colleagues, the County Manager and I have focused on five key areas, determined by the Board, as priorities in order to improve the livelihood of County residents.

Reducing Racial Disparities, Funding MECK Pre-K, Affordable Housing, Mental Health Support, and Parks & Greenways became the framework for the Board's Priorities for Fiscal Year 2020 & 2021.

Mecklenburg County invested over \$25 million (**\$25,254,538**) in new funding in FY2021 to support these areas.

Despite the impacts of the pandemic, the MECK Pre-K program opened an additional 20 classrooms, increasing the total number of classrooms to 89. The program also served 800 children while ensuring social distancing and maintaining

health and safety protocols.

The County has been able to provide additional staffing and resources to support Mental Health in the Community and at the Detention Center.

We also invested in community organizations that work toward reducing racial disparities.

And we have continued to invest in projects that support our County Parks and Recreation by providing funding to expand sections of our greenways, enhance security at County parks and provide utilities and maintenance for the County's Nature Preserve – while investing in American Legion Stadium and new recreation centers such as Eastway Recreation Center.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

The Board and I remain committed to working collaboratively with the City of Charlotte, and partner organizations to make Mecklenburg County, not only a *desirable* place to live, but also *affordable* for *everyone*.

Housing Instability and Homelessness remains as one of the leading concerns for many of our residents.

We all witnessed how dire the need for affordable housing is, as hundreds of homeless individuals transitioned out of the North End Encampment also known as Tent City, due to hazardous health conditions.

Mecklenburg County led the charge to help relocate those residents to safe, stable shelter, while permanent housing solutions can be established.

214 individuals were relocated from the Encampment.

The relocation of the encampment residents is just a temporary solution to a longstanding issue within the community.

Currently, there are 3,022 individuals experiencing homelessness in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. This total includes 1,830 single individuals of which, 86 are unaccompanied youth and 363 are families!

But Mecklenburg County continues to do its part to change the landscape for so many in the area through the Board priority – Affordable Housing.

Between Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2025, Mecklenburg County plans to invest more than \$34 million to help residents obtain and sustain housing through support from rental assistance, emergency shelter and supportive services.

Support through programs like MeckHome. This partnership between the County and Roof Above, Salvation Army Center of Hope, The Relatives, and A Way Home provides individuals and families experiencing homelessness with up to two years of rental subsidies, supportive services, and access to employment specialists to assist with their transition from homelessness to stable housing.

Over 60 households have moved from emergency shelter since the program began a year ago, and our goal is to house nearly 500 households by the end of fiscal year 2025!

Or programs like Keeping Families together, which serves families who have extensive histories, often multi-generational, with the child welfare and homeless systems. This permanent supportive housing program doubled in capacity in 2020 and is currently serving 40 families.

Or new initiatives like Evaluate Upstream. This project is designed to address the structural factors that impact access to, and sustainability of, housing.

In addition to spearheading new programs and initiatives, the Board of County Commissioners also approved plans, or committed funding, for several projects that will result in creating more than 840 (849) affordable housing units across Charlotte.

The County selected Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership to redevelop 14 acres of County-owned land adjacent to the Grier Heights neighborhood to create a new mixed-income development. The Billingsley development is expected to provide **285 units of affordable housing**.

The County also plans to sell 17 acres of land for the new Brooklyn Village Development in Second Ward. Phase 1 of the 3-Phase project is expected to result in **40 affordable housing units**.

The County and Bank of America intend to sell land for a new development at 7th & Tryon Uptown.

The proceeds from the sale will be leveraged to fund affordable housing grants.

\$6 million of grant funding has been committed to INLIVIAN to build **106 affordable housing units** uptown at 8th & Tryon.

\$7.9 Million of grant funding has been committed to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership to build a total of **326 affordable housing units** at three separate locations.

And Mecklenburg County continues to look for ways to provide housing support for our senior citizens. The Board voted to provide rental subsidies for seniors at Harmony Place in Grier Heights and Lake Mist Multi Family Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing to ensure affordability.

The Board also committed \$1.5 million to a future senior housing development, Eastway Park Apartments for 92 affordable units!

Mecklenburg County has also invested CARES ACT funding to assist with housing needs as a result of the pandemic.

In addition to the \$2.8 million allocated for rental assistance to support households facing eviction due to the pandemic, the County also used \$6.8 million for hotels to help emergency shelters meet CDC and Public Health guidelines for

COVID related protocols.

Mecklenburg County is also working to keep the conversation about homelessness and housing instability open – by engaging our residents as we work together to find new solutions to homelessness and housing instability.

Last month, the County hosted its **first** virtual town hall on homelessness. Approximately 300 people registered for the event!

CARES ACT FUNDING

While the County continues to address ongoing issues such as affordable housing – the pandemic has created new challenges for many across the community.

Thanks to support from the federal government with the help of our federal liaisons, Congresswoman Alma Adams, and Senators Tom Tillis and Richard Burr, Mecklenburg County has been able to address the challenges by providing support for those impacted through **CARES Act** funding.

The County received \$39.2 million in funding. Of that amount, \$24 million was used to transition County facilities for operation during the pandemic.

\$1.3 million was given to the United Way. And \$15 million was invested in the community.

The CARES Act funding has enabled the County to provide additional support for residents dealing with food insecurity by providing funds for local foodbanks and hot meals for seniors.

And to support our Public Health efforts by providing money for personal protective equipment for the community or communications campaigns to educate the public on COVID-19 safety measures, testing and the vaccine.

The County also invested in personal protective equipment and mental health and sanitation services for our senior citizens.

These funds were also used to help bridge the digital divide during a time where it is especially crucial to have access by creating a program through the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library to provide refurbished laptops to eligible recipients.

The County also provided funding to support the cultural sector through grants to large and small arts organizations.

We also invested in Workforce Development to provide job training for individuals impacted by the pandemic.

And we allocated funds to support individuals as they transition from jail back to the community.

Finally, the County allocated money to support the six towns in our County, by providing funding for personal protective equipment, funding for loans and grants to support small businesses; and funds to assist town residents in need of help with their rent or mortgage.

Just as Mecklenburg County strives to support its residents and towns, working with our neighboring Counties is equally important.

Mecklenburg County continues our regional advocacy collaboration with the Gaston County Board of Commissioners.

In December, the Gaston County Board Chair and I sent a joint letter to North Carolina's two U.S. Senators, urging them to support a coronavirus relief package that provides flexibility for local governments to strategically respond to the needs caused by COVID-19.

Our region will continue to work together on addressing critical issues.

In closing, Mecklenburg County continues to stand strong, by continuing to provide for the needs of our residents amid challenging times!

I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their support over the last 12 months. Vice Chair, Elaine Powell and Commissioners Vilma D. Leake, Mark Jerrell, Laura Meier, Pat Cotham, Leigh Altman and Ella B. Scarborough, thank you for all you do to make our County great!

And I would also like to thank the many elected officials and agencies from across the County for their willingness to collaborate to provide superior programs and services for our residents.

And I would also like to acknowledge our County Manager Dena Diorio for her leadership during the pandemic and every day!

But most importantly, I would like to thank YOU, the residents of Mecklenburg County. Thank you for making Mecklenburg County a great place to live, learn, work and recreate! Stay safe.

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